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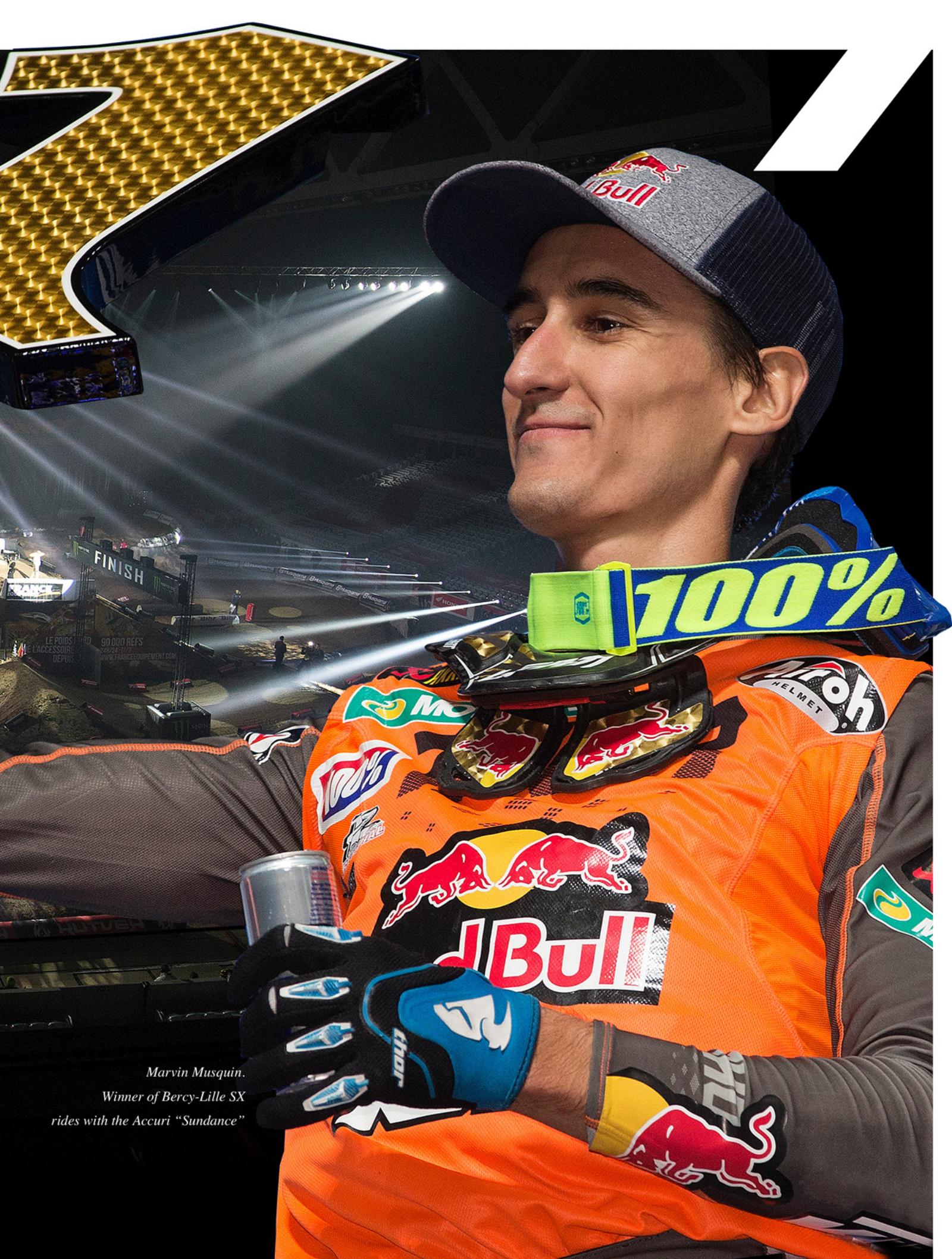
# FIT FOR A KING



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Marvin Musquin.  
Winner of Bercy-Lille SX  
rides with the Accuri "Sundance"



0

SX

## Lights on...

The third time that Lille hosted the former Paris Bercy Supercross and athletes of note lined up in France last weekend. Not a single rider could match the speed and form of KTM's Marvin Musquin in what was an impressive show of force by the Frenchman with Anaheim 1 less than two months away

Photo by Ray Archer





# A R T







**MotoGP**

## Heading into the red...

Since May MotoGP fans have wondered what the sight of Jorge Lorenzo on a factory Ducati would look like. At Valencia today the mystery eroded. The GP winner cannot talk about his initial sortie on the Desmo until the new year but first day runs on the 16 model began with basic fitting and customisation. A long and fascinating journey begins here

Photo by CormacGP















## **R rated? Nah...**

The Milan EICMA show was another glut of the shiny and new from the motorcycle industry with standout models (Superleggera anyone?) and saliva-inducing prototypes. Despite KTM's hype around the fetching 790 twin it will take something special to beat the zest and performance of the 1290 Super Duke; given a new R version by the Austrians and shown in Italy

Photo by R.Schedl/KTM



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**MotoGP**

**GRAN PREMIO MOTUL DE LA**

**RICARDO TORMO · NOVEMBER 14th · Rnd 18 of**

**MotoGP winner: Jorge Lorenzo, Yamaha**

**Moto2 winner: Johann Zarco, Kalex**

**Moto3 winner: Brad Binder, KTM**

# VELVET BLUE

JORGE LORENZO WAS AS SMOOTH AS YOU'LL EVER SEE HIM ACROSS THREE DAYS OF THE MotoGP CLOSER IN SPAIN. HIS SECOND SUCCESSIVE WIN AT RICARDO TORMO WAS A FITTING SEND-OFF TO A PROLIFIC YAMAHA TERM

Photos by CormacGP

Blogs by Neil Morrison/David Emmett





A COMUNITAT VALENCIANA

f 18

MotoGP VAL









Tha last dance. The grapple to follow Lorenzo was classic stuff, more akin to Moto3 than the premier class and involved four different brands...please let it last





**W**hat a wealth of narrative in MotoGP this year. As if the statistics and numbers were not enough you also had stories galore: Michelin, persistent rain, Miller, Crutchlow and the British hoodoo, Lorenzo's rise-fall-rise, Marquez's mature strategy, Pedrosa's annual swinging fortunes, Iannone's embellished 'villain' status, Dovizioso winning in red, KTM's debut, Rossi's mistakes and Mugello misery, Suzuki's re-birth at the front...and those are just the first that spring to mind.

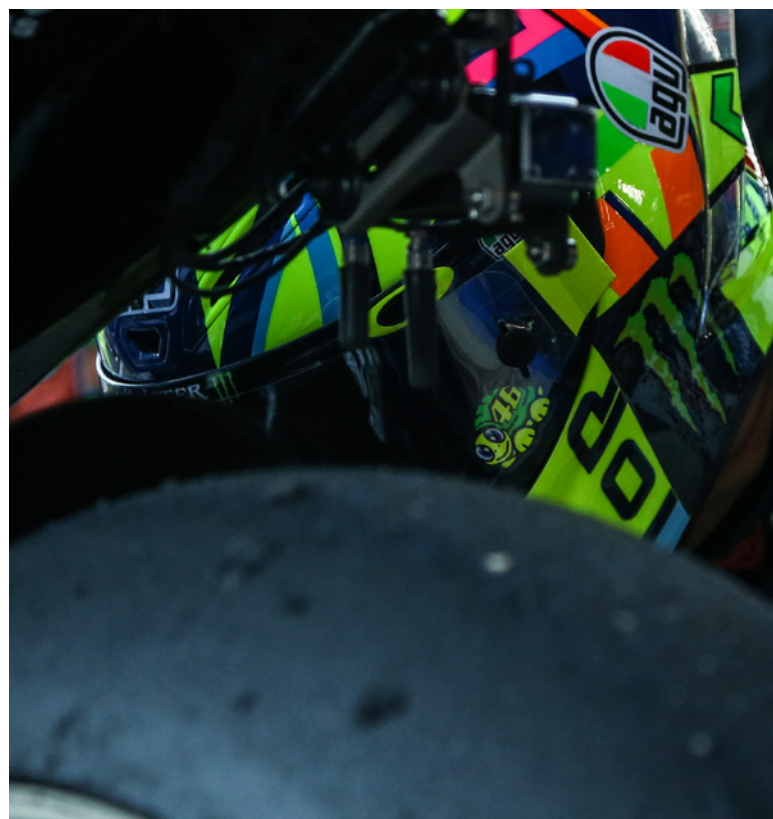
At Valencia – where the curtain was somehow drawn across a packed and busy stage (Dorna only just accommodated the nine different winners on the Spanish asphalt for a photo opp prior to action getting underway at round eighteen of eighteen) – perhaps the two most defining visions of 2016 were so readily apparent: the phenomenal sight of Jorge Lorenzo in full and imperious flow and Marc Marquez seemingly supernatural on the Honda in physics-defying pursuit.

For the second year in a row and the ninth and last of his Yamaha career chapter, the 29 year old set the fastest time ever for a motorcycle around the Ricardo Tormo layout and then followed up with winning pace for the fourth time in 2016. Lorenzo bagged the double at Valencia (Pole & victory) once more and gave the Movistar Yamaha crew the title of team champions once again. If the final Grand Prix of the term had been 32 laps instead of 30 then the outcome might have been different. Those with a careful (and cynical) eye on the 2015 incarnation of the event could doubt Marquez's capability to be able to directly overtake his countryman on Valencian turf. Those qualms remain in place but only after Marquez had a bloody good try once more. The Catalan rode possessed and with barely any remembrance of his DNFs in the last two races to knock a 5.5 second deficit to Lorenzo down to less than two and an attackable distance by the chequered flag. Again #93 showed temerity and guile (not to mention a nervy regard for Honda's chances of the manufacturer's crown...the next nearest RCV was over 54 seconds adrift in the form of Jack Miller and a third crash by Marquez would have presented the title to Yamaha) to remind all his Japanese employers what an amazing motorcyclists they have in their grasp and to racing

fans within reach of a television set or screen just how worthy the 2016 champion is of his status.

What has MotoGP meant this year? Neil and David have examined the causes for the disparity through their Blogs in the last issue and a post mortem of 2016 will rumble on a little further and once the buzz on new colours and feelings of the post-Valencia test have dominated news streams this week.

After the turbulence of rubber, standard sensor software and climate, 2017 should see the sport revert to type with the factories progressing further in their development emerging at the front. That Honda seemed to have such a turgid time getting things right and Marquez was still able to prevail – although with not as many triumphs as the 23 year old would have liked (five is still the most) – bodes ominously. Almost as a half-joke somebody on our large table in the media centre asked for 2017 title predictions Sunday evening at Valencia and was greeted by a immediate response of “Marquez”. Hardly a wild bet but the way Marc has ridden up, over and around front grip and even acceleration issues in '16 (just watch how Andrea Iannone blasted him on the straight) and then harried Lorenzo's superiority so emphatically has been startling. Even #99 admitted: “I suffered so much in the last ten laps because I saw Marquez was second and that he'd push a lot.”







Marquez's brilliance has been matched by Lorenzo's in fleeting moments while the latter was also supposedly in crisis through the mid-part of the season and through the rain; the series of crashes at Sachsenring perhaps the lowest ebb. Rossi was inspirational at Jerez and in sad conditions at Barcelona. One of the turning points of 2016 must have been the utterly deflating engine problem while he attacked with verve at Mugello. Rossi was unlikely to challenge at Valencia and has been open of his indifference to the circuit that is starting to hold some hard memories for the veteran. 2016 finished in the dust for Pedrosa and Crutchlow while Viñales was part of the second place melee that so entertained – as on many occasions that MotoGP has riveted this campaign – but must have hankered after the extra oomph of the Yamaha.

Across the following pages were some of the talking points from a sport that barely rolls off the throttle. Check out the website for images emanating from the 2017 test around the same bowl trajectory this week.













# THE SWAP...

By Gavin Emmett

**J**orge Lorenzo's peerless performance over the Valencia weekend left more than a few people happy, and not just the ones wearing blue. Even though the victory broke a run for Yamaha that stretched back to Rossi's triumph in Barcelona, and Lorenzo's own drought since the previous race in Italy, it's the folk in red who perhaps were rubbing their hands the most.

Talking with Davide Tardozzi on BT Sport on Friday, myself and Neil Hodgson asked Ducati's team boss if he would actually be happy with a win for the Mallorcan. Through his barely disguised smile you could see clearly what the answer was, but then he answered anyway. 'If we can't win, then that would be the next best thing,' was the gist of it.

We then went on to see the very best of Lorenzo throughout the rest of the race weekend, first there was his stunning pole position lap, six-tenths quicker than his "perfect lap" (his words) from 2015. Then a race which was quintessential Lorenzo, only three laps out of the 30 were outside the 1'31 barrier. Including the first and last laps. He established a gap with a sequence of 1'31.1 lap-times in the first seven, got it out to a 5.4 second lead by the 20th, then managed it to the line.

I daren't count the number of times he has done that in the 44 wins he achieved for Yamaha over his nine-year and 156-race stint with the company. The fact he hasn't managed it for 12 races

however will have been of concern to Ducati, but now he arrives with the Italians with his confidence restored.

The question is whether he will get a chance to repeat similar kinds of performances on the Ducati other than at Austria. That was the only place this year where Ducati opened up an unassailable advantage at the front, when both Andreas, Iannone and Dovizioso, cleared off from Lorenzo in third in their scrap for top honours.

It was Iannone that took victory that day, and when Lorenzo was allowed to talk about the Ducati (of which he is now prevented until January 1st) he actually likened his style to the self-styled 'Maniac' more so than his former 250cc sparring partner - however much the erratic aggression of the Italian doesn't seem to match the smooth controlled symphony of Jorge. Having said that, the #29 is definitely a lot less of a point and squirt merchant than Dovi, who is a well-known demon braker.

I keep reading and listening to experts telling me that it will be a difficult transition for Lorenzo on the bike, and they may well be right, but I have a sneaking suspicion that it could well bring the best out of him. The general feeling is that whilst both Iannone and Dovizioso have won races this year, the Desmosedici is a capable machine. I see no reason why Jorge wouldn't unlock those capabilities. Yes, he has ridden the Yamaha in a particular style for nine years, and





over those years honed the M1 to his liking, but he is also a five-time World Champion who has supreme natural ability.

The Ducati also still has a clear torque advantage over the rest, as we saw in Iannone's battles with the Honda of Marquez and Yamaha of Rossi on Sunday. It was properly demonstrated by a track that encourages first and second-gear acceleration out of tight corners, but it is something that if tallied with Lorenzo's ability to carry more corner speed than anyone could prove unconquerable.

With the boost of victory on Sunday Lorenzo will be a happier man when the cameras zoom in on his face in his first steps on board the bike during testing this week. Unfortunately, with Yamaha vetoing a second go on the Desmo later this month, then we probably won't know which way the Lorenzo experiment is going to go until the floodlights of Qatar are switched on in March. I'm already counting down the days!











A battle of Italy raged for effectively third place once Marquez had freed himself from the four-rider squabble. Tension mounted as both Rossi and Iannone barely held back; the Ducati rider's 'history' adding to the mix. "When you fight with Iannone it is always...[grimaces] and you have to do like this [makes the sign of the cross] and go!" Rossi joked afterwards and in the wake of finishing fourth for the second year in a row at Valencia. "Honestly it was a hard fight but we did not touch or anything. I think he was very aggressive with me but I was also aggressive with him and everybody played their cards. I push a lot on the right [corners] because I was stronger...but finally I was too much out of the line."

Iannone, much maligned in 2016 but also a forthright Grand Prix winner in Austria, was barely fit for the fight after returning from a fractured T3 vertebrae less than two weeks ago in Sepang. "I [did] not think of my pain [but] I have less energy," the Suzuki-bound 27 year old said. "For this I try to overtake Vale when [he] overtake me, and the bike helped a lot on the straight because of the strong power. I think this was a good strategy because I recharged a little bit the battery. Vale had a better pace compared to me but I overtook him always in every corner. So we had a great, great battle and a great result."







A mysterious clutch problem and big wheelie - while spectacular - gave Marquez one of his worst starts of the year and curtailed his chances to trail Lorenzo as his rival made the break. "Here is very, very difficult to overtake the other riders," he commented. "I was there trying and the Ducati just pass me on the straight. Then when we opened a small gap I start to push like I had nothing to lose. I saw the laps and I say: 'it will be difficult but I try.' In the end maybe two or three more laps [would have helped]. No excuse. The race is 30 laps and today Jorge made an incredible race. If he is stronger [on the Ducati] than the Yamaha it will be very, very difficult to beat him [next year]." The World Champion had admitted on Thursday that "it looks like I need some pressure to keep concentrated, like fighting for the title..." in reference to his faux pas in Australia and Malaysia and having Lorenzo as a target seemed to help. As he also said prior to the race action beginning: "Everything is now decided so everyone will push to 100%."



Marquez was unfortunately denied the chance to enjoy a version of the very first FIM World Championship winning machine - a 1949 Porcupine AJS - to the full after an oil leak meant the 67 year old machine could not be wheeled out. Former racer Sammy Miller seemed pleased to try the Repsol Honda in a fantastic novelty swap and a fine nod to the heritage of the sport. How technology has marched - sprinted in fact - over the years.





**The fact that the respective Moto2 and Moto3 World Champions both rounded off their seasons with wins number seven at Valencia seemed a straightforward fit but there was little conservative or plain-sailing about the efforts by Johann Zarco and Brad Binder to beat Thomas Luthi and Joan Mir...**

Binder was unsettled by what he thought was an engine problem on lap 2 that dropped him all the way down to 22nd as he pulled over to look at the bike and then re-entered the race. "There were a lot of stones on the track at one point and I thought the bike might have chowed one! But that was practically impossible," Binder said. He then launched on a comeback that was similar in ilk to his remarkable last-to-first performance to a maiden win at Jerez earlier in the year but with the added complication of Valencia's uncompromising tight trajectory. "In Jerez I was faster than the others and could do that rhythm quite easily whereas here there was nothing in it; I think in qualifying 28th position was just one second off. To pass here is also a problem. I was tired from pushing so, so hard and the tyres were dead...but we made it happen."

Binder also had to survive the last corner swarm with Mir and Andrea Migno in ravenous search. "I expected them to give me a proper dive but I covered the inside and got some great drive out and then did a bit of weaving and was like 'sweet, we've got this done'."

Binder graciously gave his teenage rivals a nod. "Total respect to them I spent most of my first year [in Moto3] in the gravel and on my head than doing laps on the track. There are a load of rookies... but they are exceptionally strong and to see that is awesome. I think there will be some good viewing next year."



Zarco went two on the bounce but only after some fruity exchanges with in-form Estrella Galicia 0,0 Marc VDS' Franco Morbidelli. The exciting Italian had to back-off due to tyre wear which allowed the Frenchman to forge ahead and Thomas Luthi (he who triumphed at Valencia two years ago when Tito Rabat infamously lost drive on the way to the chequered flag) also tucked through. It was a triumphant finale for Ajo Motorsport's Zarco who, at the age of 26 has proved the most complete package for the vault into the premier class next year. A move he will make relatively seamlessly by sliding into the sole French outfit on the grid. "I will keep the same mentality and try to adapt it in MotoGP," he ruminated. "I want to keep dreaming. We had nine different winners in MotoGP this year and this gives hope to the newcomers."

"I learned a lot with Aki [Ajo] and I must keep in mind this and what I gained through the whole season. He is able to manage the whole group. I am old and experienced enough to keep 'this' with me."



# CHAMPIONS



# SHAVING THE INCHES AWAY...

By Neil Morrison

**“Y**ou see the race today, and it's very simple. You don't have to think, just watch and see.” So said Mike Leitner, manager of KTM's MotoGP team, of Brad Binder, South Africa's first grand prix champion in 36 years, and his final race in the Moto3 class.

There is a reason why the Austrian factory value Binder so highly. And Sunday's win – his seventh in a near faultless run to an emphatic championship victory – was further confirmation of a rider that possesses the necessary brawn to make it far in the grand prix world. You could say that this was an even greater achievement than his back-to-front victory in Jerez.

A technical fault, which caused his KTM to cut out around two corners on the second lap of Sunday's race, pushed the 21-year old back and outside the top twenty. Such an issue would cause many to panic. Or plod round for a safe, sedate result. After all, the title was long since wrapped up.

But Binder was still stinging from the result in Sepang. Along with missing the chance to add to his win tally, a DNF there meant he lost a bet with his crew made after he claimed the title in Aragon. Win three of the final four races and we'll all shave our heads, they said. Don't, and you'll have to shave yours.

“To lose my hair over a bit of oil sucks,” he joked to the press afterwards. It was clear winning his final outing in the junior class was imperative. “I woke up this morning and I wouldn't have been happy with anything other than a win today.”

And so he climbed 21 positions in 19 laps to triumph again. It was another demonstration that Binder has been head and shoulders above the rest. To be frank, he's made a very talented field look ordinary throughout the year, and shown the value of remaining calm, thinking and advancing, bit-by-bit. It sounds simple, but it's much easier said than done when in the midst of 20 teenagers, high on the buzz of testosterone.

“This category is full of very young riders that they don't think a lot on the bike,” says Sky VR46 team boss Pablo Nieto. “They want to be first every lap, every corner. It's not a lot of strategy like before. Now it's all about fighting and big groups. The strategy is really, really difficult to make.” Along with showcasing your talent, the junior class is increasingly becoming a zone to hone one's temperament. It is here more than in any other requirement at which Binder has excelled.

His first grand prix win in Jerez was achieved in more spectacular circumstances, climbing 33 places after starting from the back of the grid. But there, he had time to prepare. He also possessed a pace far superior to the rest. And, the field wasn't as closely packed. On Saturday, one second separated the fastest and 27th placed rider in qualifying.

Perhaps what's most telling, is this latest astonishing feat came as little surprise. After all, the numbers from Binder's debut campaign make for impressive reading. Seven wins, seven further podiums and 319 points scored, 21 more than the next best rider in all three classes. Consider too Binder's advantage over Enea Bastianini, the class' second best man in '17 – 142 points was just five lower than the biggest winning advantage ever.





Binder's transformation from podium contender to serial winner has been stark. It's one that he feels stems from the feelings transmitted by Aki Ajo's tightly run Moto3 team. And a maturing on his part. "The biggest change is just the way I approach every weekend," said the South African, now 20 years old. "I always used to just have a look at the leader board to see where I was, what my position was, and that was the end of it, you know? Now I realise that if you're fifth but you have good rhythm it doesn't matter."

Binder will graduate to Moto2 with the same squad with which he won this year's title. And the one that brought Johann Zarco serial success in two highly decorated seasons. Binder's crew chief will be Massimo Branchini, with whom he worked a year ago, and man Casey Stoner charged with teaching him how to give constructive machine feedback. In other words, a highly capable technician.

And with Zarco, Lowes, Rins and Folger all stepping up to the premier class ahead of 2017, an opening exists that could allow the young South African to flourish and rack up some impressive results, fairly fast.

While his contract runs for two seasons in the intermediate class, it is believed the contract stretches for a further two, with KTM keen to bring him up to the premier class in 2019. If so, it would be total vindication for the Austrian factory's path through the grand prix hierarchy. All the way from the Red Bull Rookies programme to MotoGP. And for Binder it'd show just how far a measured, thoughtful approach can carry you.







Northcott/Monster Energy



In a Moto2 dispute hardly frugal with overtaking action - indeed the proximity of Franco Morbidelli and Zarco at times looked to be a front tyre warming exercise such was their margin from exhaust emission - that it took something special to really make a claim for 'move of the day'. Bound forward Sam Lowes. The luckless and eager Brit closed his three season Moto2 career with a last corner mugging of Alex Rins for fourth position (the end effect meaning that Morbidelli came within one point of third spot in the championship) that was as measured as it was ballsy.

"I could have done him a couple of corners before but I knew it wasn't for the win...I didn't want to risk anything but then we came up to the last one and I thought 'oh f\*\*k it...' Maybe I could have had third today and my bike was mint but in the grand scheme of things it was important to finish the race and get that fifth in the championship for the team." Aprilia, Aleix and being the fourth Briton on a grid of 22 in MotoGP beckons for the likeable #22.









"I had Aleix behind the whole race and had the feeling he could push a bit more than me but he stayed behind and so I thought 'OK, I will push more' and we caught Dovi," grinned the younger Espargaro, safe in the knowledge he had bragging rights. "I knew with one lap remaining that Aleix would not be able to pass him also."

The Catalan siblings signed-off 2016 in style and now trade Japanese machinery for Austrian and Italian; Pol leaving Tech3 since making his MotoGP debut in 2014 and Aleix moving out of Suzuki to make way for countryman Alex Rins. "The first season was OK, the level of the bike was very far from the level of the bike we have now but we achieved good results," Espargaro evaluated of his Suzuki experience. "But in the second season, the bike improved a lot and I made a lot of mistakes. Especially in the first part of the season: I was not at the level of the bike or the team. I was slow for many reasons. But I did my best and they know I did my best every time I dressed in my blue leathers, I always gave 100%. I helped them to build one of the best Suzukis in history in my opinion."

Some pity for Andrea Dovizioso, Pol and Aleix Espargaro. Their entertaining race-long scrap for fifth was overshadowed by happenings ahead of them but the Ducati, Yamaha, Suzuki trio engaged in a chase that was also memorable for the proximity of the two brothers.

"I think it's not the first time that we fight at Valencia; the year of Forward Yamaha (2014) also we fought all race," Aleix said. "It's fun to fight with my brother, I was very focused, because he was strong."

Pol also had mixed feelings over a time on the satellite Yamaha when he shone strongly in his debut term, lost confidence and faith in 2015 and then yo-yoed over the past ten months. "I feel strange; not bad, not good," he confessed. "I am so used to wearing black and it is the first time I have ever stayed so long with one team. I am a bit sad but also excited to jump on the KTM. The good thing about Yamaha Tech3 is that we always have a good base; we start the weekend fighting in the top ten. The bad thing is that we cannot improve that. We start in the top ten and we finish there. We cannot think about the top five. The bad thing about KTM is that we won't start in the top ten but maybe in the future we can start in the top five; who knows? Sometimes in life you have to choose and bet."





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Valencia seemed to sum-up much of Eugene Laverty's two-year MotoGP experience: a talented and savvy rider pushing hard but limited by his equipment. As one of two athletes that will depart MotoGP for WorldSBK in 2017 the Irishman was stoic in his farewell outing that is not a full departure thanks to his testing/replacement role for the factory Aprilia set-up in 2017. "Same old story with this bike; too much weight on the front and then getting better as the fuel went down; I've never had to fight so hard for a sixteenth place. I think Tito [Rabat] passed me five times," he said. When asked for some reflection on a MotoGP stint with the Aspar team that was often as bruising as buoyant – his fourth place in Argentina this spring the undoubted highlight - the 30 year old remarked: "I learned consistency and when to push and when not...and also a lot about my riding style. A few different bikes in the last years and I think I am much more of a complete rider. The Honda suited me and I was able to get around any problems but the Ducati is not a bike that suited me naturally and I had to adapt; I enjoyed that."

Laverty stays in MotoGP mode for the Valencia test but then has to think Superbike in Jerez a week later. A belated honeymoon and R&R also lay ahead somehow. "I've had some of the biggest crashes in my career in the last twelve months so some time off will be good but the calendar has been planned out until January and there is still a lot to do," he added.

Eugene was able to get a good look at the RS-GP in practice and especially warm-up thanks to a close run with Alvaro Bautista (his Aspar replacement on a later spec Ducati). "I like what they are doing with that bike," he opined. "They don't have bucketloads of power but they are using it in the right way. Some of the things learnt here I can transfer across [to SBK]. You saw Chaz's turnaround and maybe that came from some good communication from Ducati here and obviously Kawasaki don't have that [crossover]. The Aprilia might be an older bike [in SBK] but from what we learnt here can come across and maybe help."







Jorge Lorenzo knew he'd have the headlines after Valencia and in his first appearance on the Desmosedici and there was a pretty good chance that he'd also be feted if he could repeat the form of 2015. "On Saturday here last year I made the best lap of my life: the pressure was huge," he said on Thursday. "The lap was incredible. I pushed all the time in the race. I was so fast in the beginning and it was difficult for Marc to keep my pace."

Saturday came and went with a new blaze of speed and Sunday was again superlative. Lorenzo gave himself a mark of "10" for the Grand Prix but only "6.5" for the season owing to "too many mistakes and a lot of struggle in cold conditions, in wet conditions."


Glowing, Lorenzo also harked back to Valencia 2015 as one of his favourite memories in Yamaha colours. "It was very important because I had all the pressure on me and I reached my highest level. [It was] probably the closest championship in my career and my last world title for Yamaha. But Assen in 2013 also very special because I achieved one thing that had been impossible; coming from an operation and thirty hours [injured] finishing a MotoGP race in the top five. This was amazing also."











Ninth place for Bradley Smith who was still walked wounded due to his ligament-less left knee. "I am still grinding out my toes, which means I am not riding as I need to," he said on the eve of Valencia. "The issue is still flexibility and normally it should just be a twist but when you get run over by 275 kilos at 100mph it leaves damage; bone damage, tissue damage and everything else," he added in reference to his accident sustained in practice for the final round of the FIM Endurance World Championship. "I'm pretty sure by January 31st I will be fit and healthy to ride MotoGP. I am probably another four-five weeks away from where I need to be with this injury. I have to be super-careful because I don't have an ACL so it is a limiting factor for motocross and I have to build up the muscles to compensate. It is not a necessity but it would be silly to undo all the hard work we have made so far to get here. For the best part of my career now I will have to do without an ACL but so be it."

Naturally the switch from black to orange was back on the agenda and after having popped up numerous times during the season and his amazingly-early declaration of signing for KTM just before the first Grand Prix of the year. "It is going to be very strange but from what I understand a lot of the team are guys that I know and that should help with the transition," he said in reference to his transfer from Tech3 – his home since 2011 and when he moved out of the 125cc class. "That gelling aspect will take time but KTM seem to have done that fantastically over the range of championships they have been involved with and it should not be an issue."



So many kilometres of testing (a figure of 10k was hiked around the press room), a decent dollop of hype and the high standards that KTM put into their racing projects meant that their wild-card debut at Valencia gathered a lot of attention. The RC16 looked, sounded and circulated the part as the KTM board members and sizeable elements of their R&D and Design departments also looked on. Mika Kallio – making his first MotoGP appearance since 2010 and race outing in almost a year – manhandled the racebike that team staff admitted was a little less agile than its competitors but lacked nothing in terms of grunt and power; quite typically for an Austrian powerplant.

Serious faces and frowns were aplenty on Friday with Kallio posting a 1min 33 second lap-time while complaining of a lack of rear grip and slower than what the team had achieved in testing. Smiles returned on Saturday as the Finn found an extra second and the bike was twentieth on the grid instead of twenty-second and last. The race sadly lasted 19 laps as a broken sensor prematurely ended their harshest session yet.

“I did maybe 5, 6, 7 laps without any problem and we basically broke one sensor quite early in the race and riding became much more complicated,” recounted Kallio who had been running in the top twenty. “It was at that point I started to lose the distance to the other guys. It was different when I opened the gas and I was confused with what was happening. I realised something may have broken and we lost a lot of power. The acceleration was a lot worse with the problem. I couldn’t calculate the wheelspin anymore and it started to spin more and overheat the tyre. This one small problem caused many others.”

“I kept going but then we struggled with the other sensor and it was impossible to continue so I decided to come in. Even if that was a negative point I think we can be happy with the weekend. We demonstrated that we are not miles away from the other bikes and we could be in the same group in the first laps. I could follow the other guys and fight with them.”

Kallio also offered his assessment of the KTM project that will see Pol Espargaro and Bradley Smith try this week (although they are not permitted to comment publicly on the experience). “I could see that the engine is our strong point and I was really happy with how it was pulling out of the corners and even without using wings,” he said, while also saying the bike was balanced even with a full fuel tank at the beginning of the race; an issue that Espargaro, in particular, struggled with the Yamaha. “Maybe the weak point was the first part of the middle of the corner and opening the gas because we lose the rear grip somehow. That is where we are losing most of the time.”



Crew Chief Paul Trevathan said that “our library is zero and we need to fill it,” while also stating that the different input of at least four other test riders helped in the evolution of the RC. Head of Factory Racing Sebastian Risse said that a tyre switch with the Michelin race-spec rubber helped advance the project on Saturday. He also commented that the bike had evolved significantly since the initial unveiling and MotoGP track time at the Spielberg test in the summer and the post-Valencia test with the new riders would be about adaptation as well as trying some new minor parts. “I think [the bike] is quite stable and I think the engine is quite strong,” he said. “You will not see that in the top speed [KTM were 18th in the speed traps with 313.6kmph compared to Iannone’s 322.0] because there are a lot of parameters and it depends on the track. Let’s say down force, air resistance, corner exit grip all play into the total performance on the straight...but looking at the engine I think we have quite a strong package. The weak point I think is turning and grip and what we need to work on.”





MotoGP VAL



KTM images by Sebas Romero



## Leitner speaks...

**The KTM VP of Onroad stood in front of the press on Sunday afternoon to summarise the Valencia experience...**

### **On Kallio's performance...**

Mika Kallio has not been racing for some time, so he made a good start and he was on a good pace. He kept the lap times up to the moment that the first problem showed up. Then he dropped the lap time a little and then the speed sensor on the rear was completely lost, so he had to stop the race. But up to this moment, ten laps, he could do the rhythm of the guys there. I think this was very impressive.

### **On whether this was a previous technical problem...**

No, it's really a new one. The first time we've faced it this year. We did race distances as part of our testing and we never had this. But that's why this is a 'test'; a wildcard was super important in order to come here and do a race week with the rhythm of the GP and with the pressure and the other people on the track. Of course we would have liked to finish the race, but on the other hand it's also a very big warning that each small detail on these bikes is so important.

### **On the attention and gaze of all KTM...**

Yeah, it was quite emotional. Yesterday after qualifying everybody was happy. We went to a lap time in the area of being acceptable for our project. We were expecting the lap times that we can do now. It's not like we want to stay with those times in the future but we have to be realistic. Of course our wish was to finish this race. It didn't happen but it will make us stronger and working harder over the winter to fix these things.

### **On the time constraints of making a brand new MotoGP project...& why Valencia was the first wild-card...**

The bike touched the asphalt for the first time last November and it's not like you are building something simple. It's a very complex tool and you need time to develop this kind of tool. I think it was a great achievement from the company because really - to be fair - if you asked me last year at that time if we would do the wildcard here then I think everybody [around us] would have said no. We did a full test season and in May/June we felt okay, doing good steps, so then the idea came up that maybe we should do a wild card. We should risk it. I think it was a great decision. Sure, the dream was to finish the race but I think all the company and all the people working hard learn a lot out of that weekend?

### **On the positives and negatives of the weekend...**

The biggest positive was that we had no technical issue until the race and the negative was we had it!

### **On where to improve...**

To be fair, we are really looking forward to getting Brad and Pol on the bike because they will tell us very clearly where we have the biggest handicap. So to find this out before end of November is super-important and then we try to make steps until Doha. We will try to push for the winter test. Of course we will suffer a lot because the time will run, the others are working and are fast. This is now a start point and we will go. The team is strong and it has to be strong because we have a big target in front of us. And they have to show next year more that they have to be strong. And we will go for that.





**On working with Japanese and European teams/factories...**

I was working with the biggest bike builder on the planet, with a top team, with a top rider. It was an impressive time. You learn a lot. The mentality of Japanese people in approaching a target is impressive, clear and because they do it for so many years and they are very, very professional. The company in Austria wants to do the same things from the professional side but maybe sometime it's more emotional. I am now two years in the KTM family and what I see is it's a very big human part, which is a big factor in this project. You really feel the heart is fully there. This is also super-motivating and...of course you have to have the professionalism and the technology to achieve.

**On perhaps using race tyres for testing...**

The material we got from Michelin over the year was okay for the stage we were in. There would not have been any meaning at the start to get the last spec tyres. We have been well treated by Michelin. Now we have run this construction of the front tyre for the first time but every team has had to adapt. So this was a set-up job.













## MAKING THE JUMP...

By David Emmett

**B**y the time you read this, 2017 will have started. The bumper rider migration will have reached its natural end, and everyone will have the first day of testing on their new bikes under their belt. There will be winners and losers, some riders will be faster than they were during the race on Sunday, others will be slower. The media and the fans will have drawn their conclusions, and have declared a provisional winner of the 2017 championship. I will also do the same, and like the rest of the fans and the rest of the media, I will almost certainly be wrong.

It is easy to overlook just how big a change it is to go from one bike to another. We in the media focus almost entirely on how a rider is getting on aboard their new machine. How quickly can they change their riding style? What are the teams doing to the bike to make it suit the rider better? Can they exploit the strengths of the new bike? Can they ride around its weak points? Can they, if they are very special, find a way to turn those weak points into strong points, as Casey Stoner once did with Ducati's understeer?

There will be preliminary answers to all of these questions after the first two days of testing. We will have an idea who is adapting well and who less so. The timesheets showing every lap completed will reveal who has genuine pace, who managed to squeeze out a single fast lap by riding well outside their comfort zone, and who could not even summon the courage to push well beyond. Pictures, videos, and reports from trackside will tell the tale of who is stiff on the bike, and who has immediately melded with their new machine to become as one.

The test will not tell the whole tale, though. What the timesheets won't reveal will be how well new relationships are being forged in the garage. Riders are not only climbing on new bikes, they are also fitting into a new team. Swapping garages is not just a metaphor, it is a very literal expression of what they must do. Even when they take crew chiefs and mechanics along, they also have to take time to adapt to their new surroundings. MotoGP bikes are incredibly complex beasts, crew chiefs cannot learn to unlock their secrets in a single day.

The real hard work of switching bikes has only just begun at Valencia. If riders have a new crew chief, they have to learn to communicate with each other. Riders have to learn how to express themselves so that the crew chief understands what their biggest problem is. Crew chiefs have to interpret the series of hand gestures and imitated engine noises and translate them into meaningful information about the behaviour of the motorcycle. Crew chiefs have to figure out whether the rider's fiery rant was a sign of frustration, or one of intense faith in their abilities to fix problems and make a better motorcycle.

This process even extends to the smallest of details. Organising the garage so that the rider is sitting where they are most comfortable – for one rider, that is in a corner, for another, it is in the centre. Ensuring that the data engineer can explain the most salient points he is seeing in the data, and give the rider the information they need to try to fix certain problems. Making sure that the chef in the team's hospitality always has food ready when the rider wants to eat it, and providing something the rider will actually want to eat.





Checking that the team logistics coordinator knows that the new rider prefers to fly from one particular airport, rather than another which is the same distance away. Organising interview schedules for riders that fits in with their technical debriefs with their crews. Managing the often prickly relationship between teammates, settling arguments over who is to go first with their media debriefs, who is to eat first, even whose name is first on the press release.

## ***“Team changes can be much more important than riders let-on when talking to the press...”***

All of these details matter, and can make a difference. On Thursday at Valencia, Bradley Smith spoke at length about these changes, and how they can end up being much more important than the riders let-on to the press in most cases. “It’s a lot bigger than we make out,” he said. “Because 1% is huge inside of racing.” 1% of a 43 minute race – the average length of a race on the MotoGP calendar – amounts to a total of nearly 26 seconds. Like most modern sports, motorcycle racing is all about marginal gains, Smith explained, and those marginal gains add up to a lot over the course of a race.

“All those relationships clicking, gelling, getting that confidence, inspiration, little relationships that you’ve got, all of those add up,” Smith said. “And all of that doesn’t add up to 1%, but it’s all a little bit towards that, and then it all comes together.”

Building those relationships takes time, requiring investment that will only pay off in the long run. “I would say, it’s a good six months before you actually feel that you’re all coming together and you’re all working on that,” Smith said. “And the same thing with a new bike, it does take a good amount of time before you’re actually into it and you’re starting to ride naturally.”

This is an issue that should not be underestimated. “That’s another thing, I’m going to have to ride in a completely different way than I have in the last four years with this new motorcycle. And this is world class racing: you have to ride naturally, it has to come automatically. You can’t think at 360 km/h. It has to happen before you can think. And those type of things take a while. For the rider, mentally and physically it’s quite hard for the first six months, but then after that, you just settle in. So yes, we are saying, ‘oh it’s just part of the job...’ but it is more than that. But you can’t make too much of a big deal, because everyone is going to try and gel. But those type of relationships take time.”

So when you see the timesheets on Tuesday night, or perhaps on Wednesday evening, make sure you have a pinch or two of salt handy. The times posted will be significant, but they will not tell the whole story of the test. As riders get to grip with machines, and more importantly, grow to become part of a team, they will slowly get faster. They should have found those couple of tenths they were missing at Valencia, just in time for the early MotoGP races. Go ahead and draw conclusions from what you saw at Valencia this week. Just don’t go and bet the house on it.



## BIAGGI TALKS NEW MAHINDRA LINK-UP

On a stage where he never conquered a class in Grand Prix despite seven attempts (Valencia hosting a round each year since 1999), Max Biaggi still cut an empiric figure at Ricardo Tormo in the announcement of his racing team with full backing from Mahindra. The 45 year old Italian has joined with the liveliest manufacturer in Moto3 to conjure his own two man squad to contest the Campionato Italiano Velocità (CIV) and selected races of the FIM CEV Repsol Moto3 Junior World Championship with a goal of being in the Grand Prix paddock once more in 2018. Ushered into the Mahindra office truck in the paddock at Valencia the former 250cc and World Superbike Champ was afforded an audience of journos curious to hear about his project and the reasons to drift back into competition once more with designs on the highest level...

### **On his motivation for a different role...**

There is quite a bit. I have been thinking about this for a few months now quite deeply and finally it all came together. I'm working for the Mahindra factory and like an ambassador or a front man for them. I will follow some Moto3 and MotoGP races for them....but not the whole championship. We will be focused on the Moto3 national championship and the purpose is to raise young talent from Italy. This is not like a competition with the VR academy or something similar; we don't like to focus on big things. It will be two riders, two chances, two possibilities. We want to give the best support we can to these two people. We will prepare and do a lot of testing because there is not so much of that for the Italian championship, maybe just two tests before the new season. Our idea is to let them test every month. Testing with these bikes means costs and it is expensive. The Italian championship is six rounds, twelve races but we will go to the Spanish championship so it means two months out. For me it is an amazing project and to bring something or someone up from a low level is good.

### **On Mahindra missing a former racer as part of their organisation...**

From my position it is not easy to go back into this role. Sometimes if you look from the outside you have everything to lose and nothing to win. But it is good for the sport and good for Mahindra because they are showing their muscle. This year they won three races against top names like Honda and KTM. Now they just need a little step and the dream can come true. Our goal is the Italian Championship and some Spanish races in 2017. In 2018 to come here [Grand Prix] with two riders that are ready for this championship. If not we come with one only and maybe someone here who will suit my team.

### **On considering this role while he was still racing...**

No! When I left here and went to Superbike and then made one or two races last year just for fun. That was it. Enough. This is a big project. I am Team Principal but I am also investing my money. Some others will help but you have to invest in structure and people. I have invested a lot in the team members because the right people can make the difference but they have to believe in the lower level. I am taking people that were working in the world championship and normally nobody wants to take a step down so I pushed them to come here with a promise that in 2018 we will be here. It was not easy.

### **On competition with Rossi...**

One day, maybe, but that was not my goal. We need to set up and start this programme and it does not mean that after one year we will be ready to come here. We will try our best but the academy with Rossi has already been [in existence] and they have good results. I'd prefer to be lower level and thinking of progress.

### **On the role of Mahindra...**

We have an agreement and it is like a 'give and a get'. They get me for this role and I get Mahindra and they have put me into position where I can count on them for spares, tests...we are coming closer [together]. Their goal is to have these young



guys make a lot of miles on the bike and to understand wheelspin, a pushing front end and things like this. These young guys don't really know what happens on the bike and what happens on the telemetry is not the same as they say! They don't know how to describe. We want to give words to their feelings. I would bet my own money that half the people here do not know how to read telemetry...because they are riders! Maybe they are riders, they get the bike and they go. The guys who are always near the top? For sure they know.

### **On changing roles...**

I was on the other side of the table as a rider, so it is not simple and as a rider you think everything happens automatically and it is not like this. My goal is to teach them in the quickest way possible the track, the motorcycle, speed, the time, lose, win, advantages. It is not that easy but I want to give them the best equipment possible to save time.

### **On working with kids...**

The youngest is fourteen so he is already pre-Moto3, so he is not from another world and has already been riding this kind of motorcycle. I have a lot of passion to do this now.

### **On testing the bike...**

No! I'm done. It is also not nice to do something in their field. I have to be outside.

### **On coaching other Mahindra riders...**

Starting from 2017 our goal will be to try and win the Italian Championship and do well in the Spanish ones. In case – and this is a question mark – we might make a wild-card in the world championship. Only if he is at a good level and leading the series.

### **On the riders...**

The main one is Alex Del Bianco and the other is Davide Baldini; the youngest one. Why these? Last year I made some Supermoto races and he was doing that championship while also Moto3 in Italy. I was competing with him and thought 'he's not so bad...' and he was the youngest one. I went to

watch the last round and he did well without the best bike. He didn't have the best possibilities so I decided to create something and play the card.



### **On joining Mahindra...**

There are a few people in the factory that used to work with Aprilia and it was easy for me to relate to them and understand their project. It looks like we are going in the same direction. The technical side is not my job...but it is like we are talking the same language. I like their enthusiasm and their desire to succeed. They are not Honda but they are catching up. We started coming together in June and we go testing in Jerez in ten days – normally something that is beyond the budget for any team doing the Italian Championship – but will we spend the money to give them this possibility. We will not be asking the riders for money. We will launch the team in ten days in the mountains with something cool and then do some altitude training.

### **On always wanting to promote Italian talent...**

I'm Italian so I will watch my 'field' but if we move here in '18 – and one of those riders will not be ready because he is too young, I hope he can make major progress but I think he needs a couple of years – so we can look for another rider here and he can be Spanish, Japanese whatever. The speed is the only thing we are looking for.











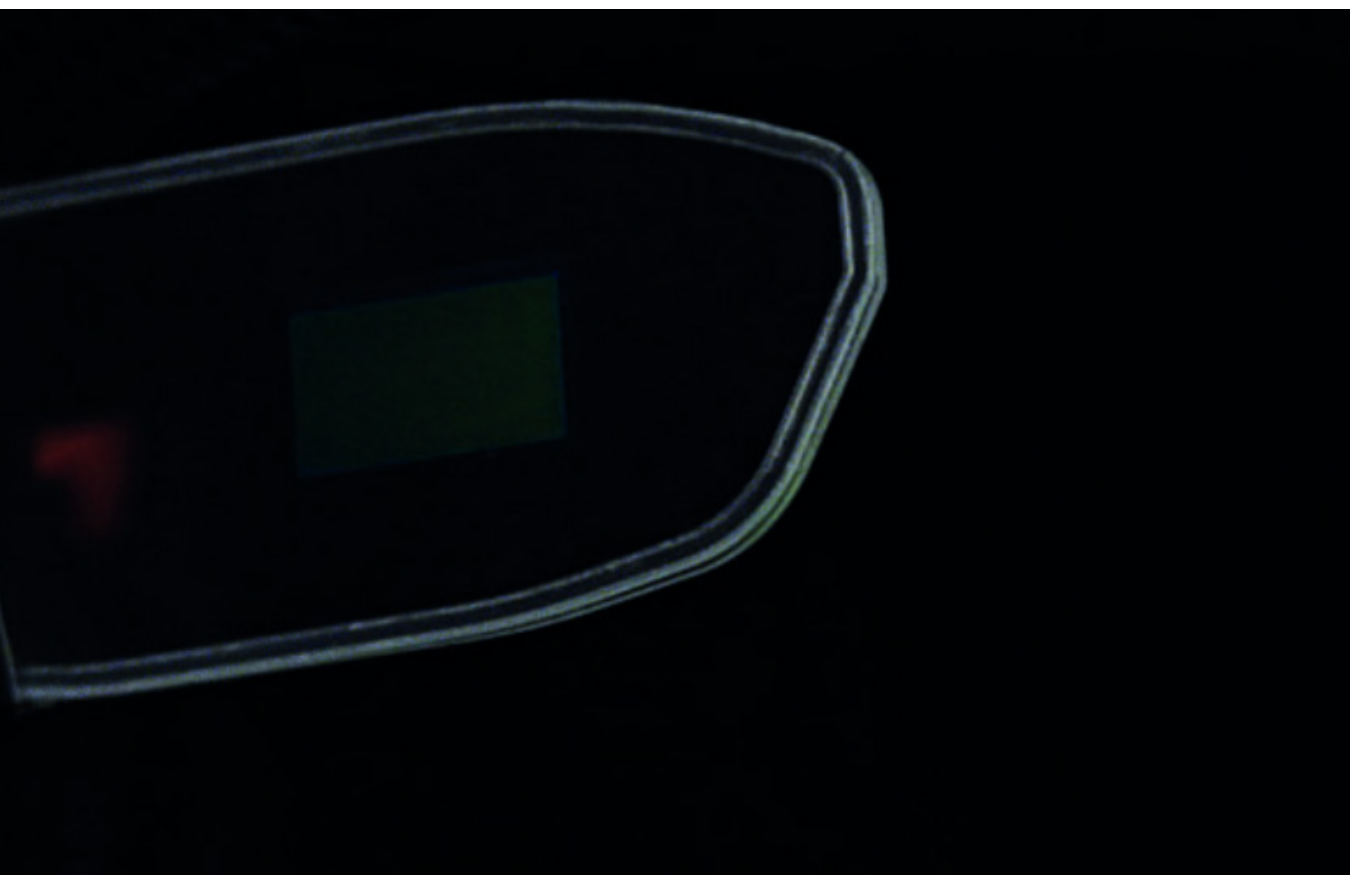
### NOLAN

Something a little special from the Italians as the several of the latest helmet prototypes on display at EICMA focussed on next generation lids and offerings beyond merely comfort and safety. In association with Sony, Nolan presented the N-Com ARX and an experiment with what they call 'augmented reality'. The ARX apparently 'incorporates Sony's unique holographic waveguide technology provided in form of optical module, that takes the light created in the optical engine and projects a virtual image through the holographic optical elements to the eyes of the wearer.' In short: a small screen will fill the role of a HUD with a smartphone app in what is something of a controversial and hopeful experiment. "Our prime objective remains the safety of our clients, but this kind of technology also represents the near future for motorcyclists and we definitely do not want to find ourselves unprepared," said Claudio Corollo N-Com Division Manager. No word of further moves on the product but the video makes for interesting viewing.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=X3verLljzmw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X3verLljzmw)













A close-up, low-angle shot of Wayne Rainey's red and yellow Yamaha motorcycle, showing the front fairing with the number 2 and various sponsor logos like MOTUL, TEAM ROBERTS, and MICHELIN. The background is dark and blurred, suggesting motion on a racetrack.

WAYNE RAINEY: THE YEARS AFTER

# THE STORY LESS TOLD

**WAYNE RAINEY** IS THE LAST TRULY GREAT AMERICAN ROAD RACER TO HAVE FILLED GRAND PRIX RECORD BOOKS. FROM MISANO 1993 TO TEAM MANAGEMENT AND SUBMERGING BACK INTO THE SCENE WITH THE DETERMINED MOTOAMERICA PROJECT WE WANTED TO PASS THROUGH THE PHASE OF THE 56 YEAR OLD'S LIFE AWAY FROM A MOTORCYCLE. ANDREA WILSON SAT DOWN WITH THE CALIFORNIAN TO CHAT...

By Andrea Wilson  
Photos by Andrea Wilson/Yamaha Racing





FEATURE





**P**rofessional racers aren't normal people. Champions even less so. They achieve feats that seem almost superhuman, thriving in adversity and bouncing back from odds that for most would spell 'finished'. The sport is populated with many examples, but there is one guy who stands out: Wayne Rainey. Racer. Team Manager. Family man. And now the face of America's Superbike Championship – MotoAmerica, which is in the process of a massive rebuild.

Flat tracker turned road racer, Rainey scored two Superbike National Championships before going overseas. He then went on to clinch three 500cc World Championships during what many consider to be the glory years of Grand Prix racing, with riders trying to tame vicious, fire-breathing two-strokes, and some intense competition. It's no wonder that most of the focus is on Rainey the racer, but that's only a fraction of his story and perhaps the most interesting part is the story less told – Rainey after racing.

"I've had a unique career in motorcycle racing," Rainey said. "I've been racing since I was nine years old. This is all I've ever dreamed about - motorcycles, racing bikes. I just loved the feeling about the whole thing. So I had my racing career and did all that. Then when I had my racing accident it was like, not only was my life changed from waking up to getting out of bed, but it was also my professional life was different because I was never going to race a motorcycle again."

The accident and subsequent paralysis at Misano in 1993 may have ended Rainey's career as a motorcycle racer, but it didn't stop Rainey the man.

"I remember Frank Williams, the Formula 1 car racer/owner. He'd come over to see me when I was still in rehabilitation in Long Beach, still trying to figure out how to get dressed and do all those things," Rainey said. "He came over

and he basically got real straight with me and just said some pretty clear things that I can't say in this interview, but he was absolutely 100% correct. You either get out of bed or stay in bed. Get after it."

So Rainey took that advice and got after it. Six months after his accident, he was in Australia to announce his new role as team owner for factory Yamaha's 250cc Grand Prix program, a short time frame that is perhaps forgotten.

"It was pretty clear I had a lot of opportunities in the racing world, because that's where I was. So that's what I did," he explained. "I had Kenny Roberts helping me. He opened some doors. I had my relationship with Yamaha, with the sponsors at the time – Philip Morris. So we were able to put the team together."

Even with other options available, being Rainey, he didn't necessarily go the easy route. There was a lot to process in the transition – personally and professionally, but he had a lot of support.

"When we started the team, normally you transition into those things, but mine was like - one day I was a racer and the next day I wasn't," he said. "I was a team owner six months later. I was still trying to figure out my new life, my new situation. But everybody in the motorcycle world, in the paddock was very open-arms. They gave me a lot of space and they wanted me there. That's what I felt."

Rainey approached being a team owner the same way he did as a racer – total commitment. And part of that commitment was going through the learning curve.

"Being a racer, everything you do is all about trying to put yourself in the best position to win," he explained. "Running the team... you need the best riders. You need the biggest budget. You need the best bikes. You needed the right crew. You need a good truck. You



## FEATURE

need a good place to work out of. You needed a good structure for all this to work together – management. There was so much more than just getting on the bike. So every year I got a little more organized, a little more structured.”



Looking back on it, though, Rainey would do a few things differently, mainly going easier on the riders. After all it was hard not to project how he approached racing, especially when he had so much success.

“I saw why I was World Champion, because of my all-out commitment to myself,” he explained. “I loved being an underdog, even though when you look at my results or what people say, they never called me the underdog, but that’s the way I always kind of looked at myself. I liked it when the other guys were faster, and then I had to try to figure out a way on Sunday to beat them. I loved that. So when I started working with other riders what I probably should have paid more attention to is that everybody does it a little bit different.”

Riders only have to manage themselves, so the experience of being team owner broadened Rainey’s horizons and prepared him for his latest endeavor – taking the helm as President of MotoAmerica in the series rebuild from the ashes.

“Through that experience I learned to let the people who know their job do their work. I learned to go, there’s other ways to do this,” he said. “I think it’s the same thing in business. The key is to get the right team where everybody gels and everybody knows their lane. Let them do their job.”

But he stepped away from the team thing, to be fully committed to the most important job out there – being a Dad. When his son Rex became of school age, Rainey left the jet setting life of running a race team in the World Championship so that their son had proper schooling and a more stable home life away from the road.

“When he (Rex) had to start school, we had to be in one time zone, so I decided to retire from the sport altogether,” he explained. “I came home and Shae (Rainey’s wife) and I raised Rex. That was my focus.”

But the racing bug never died. Rainey got into Kart racing, a perfect way to balance family and racing; especially when you live basically across the street from a legendary track like Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca.

“I did a bit of karting with my dad and Eddie Lawson. So that was fun,” he said. “It was nice that I could still put my helmet on and be competitive and have fun and go fast, and be in the same time zone, and live right across the street from Laguna Seca and be able to go over there and play around.”

Eventually he worked his way back to motorcycle racing, but during that time frame Rainey had stepped away from it. What eased him back in was the return of MotoGP racing in the states at Laguna Seca, which Rainey played



WAYNE RAINEY: THE YEARS AFTER





a big part in with making that happen. Bringing Grand Prix racing back to the U.S. was a big deal for American fans. It was also a big deal for the soon to be World Champion Nicky Hayden, who won the first two U.S. Grands Prix at Laguna Seca, the second of which helped secure his World Championship in 2006.

So he dipped his toes back in with helping Laguna Seca get the GP, but Rainey dove back into the sport in a big way to make a difference with road racing in the U.S., which was on a steady decline.

"I got completely away from it," he said. "I built a few houses and then as time went on though I got a little bit bored and started thinking about what I could do or what kind of opportunities might be out there. When Rex went off to college, Shae looked at me and said, 'you got to find something to do.' So I guess I did."

He has plenty to do now. He and his KRAVE partners have a difficult task on hand to revive the Superbike Championship in the U.S., a series that was in a worse state than they imagined.

"I wasn't real close to watching what was going on in the U.S. thing," he admitted. "I would go to a few Grands Prix, but basically I was very far away from the actual challenge of what was going on here in the States. I'd hear things but when we took it over and we actually saw some of the issues once we picked it up, we kept learning that this was going to be a pretty big challenge, but my life's been a big challenge so I was up for it."

Under the helm of new management, the newly formed MotoAmerica has made steady progress in just two years. Like all champions, or anyone successful in life, Rainey doesn't shy away from a challenge, he learns from it.

"In the end it's racing motorcycles, and the worst day of racing motorcycles is better than any job in the world," he said. "Same thing

with this racing series. That's the way I kind of look at it. It's difficult. I'm not going to kid you. There are times when I get frustrated about some of the things. Sometimes in business you go down a path and you don't really see the correct way until you go through the tough times. Then you learn so much there that it really helps you to make decisions because of those tough times that you went through. That's the way life is. That's the way it is in business too."

It's another adjustment, being on the other side of the fence running a race series, but in the end, Rainey finds satisfaction in giving back to the sport he loves.

"I feel I have a responsibility to the sport," he said simply. "It's given me everything that I have. So whether I'm having a good day or a bad day, that's kind of what I focus on. As long as I can stay healthy, then I can slog myself through the tough times doing this job."





WAYNE RAINEY: THE YEARS AFTER





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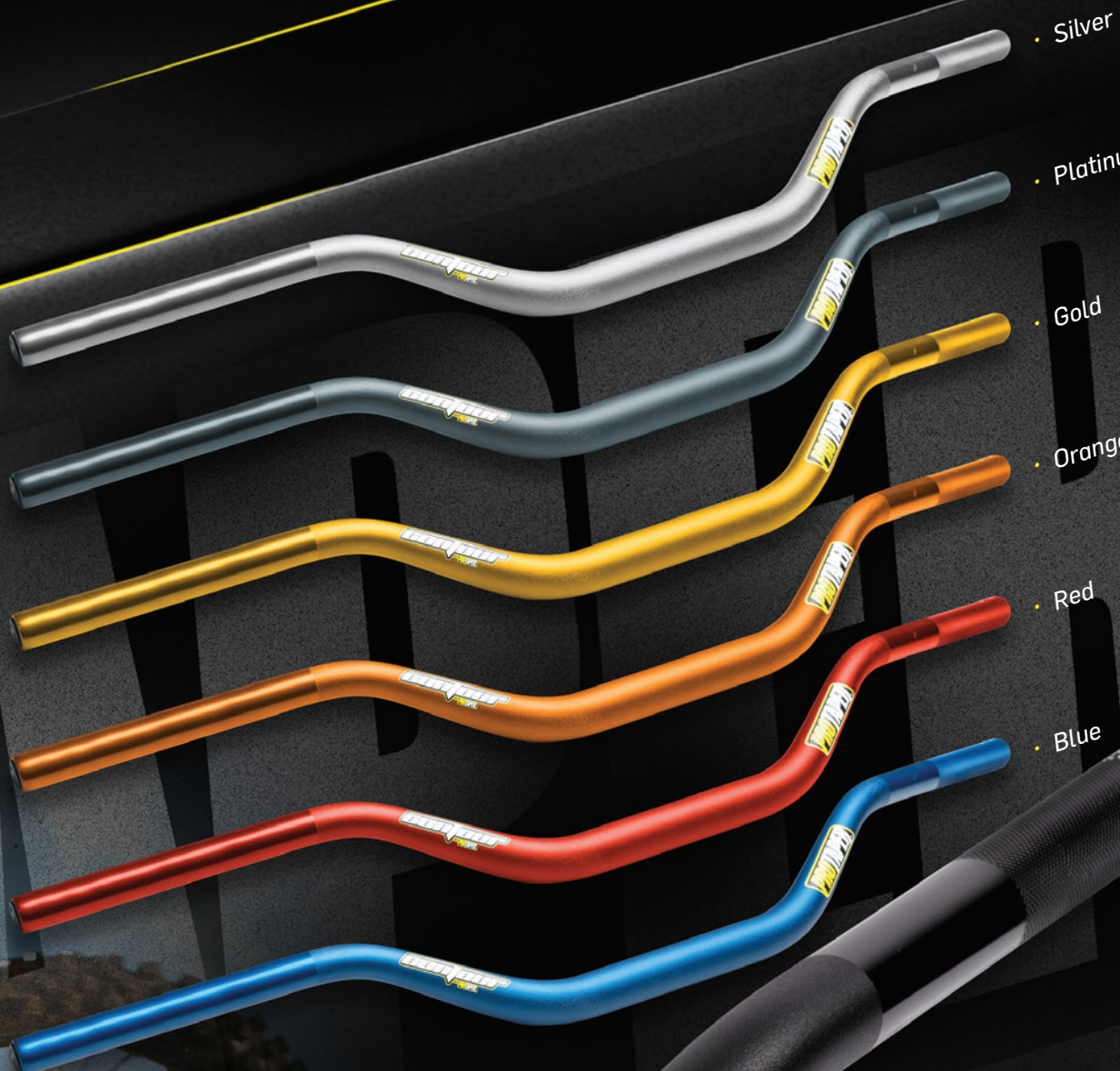
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**FEATURE**

# THE SOURCE

KNOWN AS ONE OF (IF NOT THE) BIGGEST NAMES IN THE MOTOCROSS AND EXTREME SPORTS LIFESTYLE APPAREL MARKET, FOX RACING SEEM TO CREATE A STIR AND SET THE BAR WITH EVERY LAUNCH OF THEIR ANNUAL RIDING COLLECTIONS. CURIOUS TO KNOW WHERE AND HOW THE ENDLESS FONT OF CREATIVITY FOR FORGING THE LOOK AND PACE OF THE INDUSTRY WAS COMING FROM WE ASKED FOR ACCESS TO THE FOX 'BRAIN' AT THEIR OFFICE IN IRVINE. HERE IS WHAT WE DISCOVERED...

By Adam Wheeler  
Photos by Ray Archer





THE SOURCE: FOX & DESIGN





**T**ake a piece of paper and draw the outline of a shirt and some riding pants. If you feel ambitious then also some gloves. Now contemplate a design. Think it's easy? That scheme has to look cool, appeal to hundreds of thousands of riders, placate a star racer who will perform in public and provide widespread exposure, hit sales margins, carry some longevity and somehow predict and forecast what the general taste of the market will be two years down the line. That drawing will also need to carry details of how your gear is offering customers more for their buck. What fabrics and protection are involved? What panel goes where? Will it last, protect and do its job as well as catching the eye? Seems a bit more complicated now.

If the creation of apparel feels like a mammoth task then what about the role of a company like Fox Racing? A 42 year old family-honed business that has somehow managed to set the tone and feel for the industry and now nestles in a suitably California open, airy atrium of workspace and easy vibes. Talk about pressure, and a year-on-year responsibility. Of course there are times when a firm like Fox are very strong; when one idea or look really catches the imagination and resonates. This has actually happened frequently and they have crafted a reputation for thinking a little differently. Fox Racing has become ingrained in motocross culture and history thanks to its application to product development and aesthetics and therefore affiliations with some of the best riders to have twisted a throttle in anger.

Irvine, Southern California is where the hub of this creativity and design resides. Fox also has offices further up the state as well as in the jewel of the Mediterranean, Barcelona, for their European branch. Irvine is the melting pot however and where the garments and product of tomorrow are somehow spilled onto a page, sewn or printed into samples, approved and distributed around the world.

"We have roughly twenty-one designers working over the three divisions (MX, Bike, Lifestyle)," says the amiable Mark Finley, Global Category Director and long-term 'Foxee'. "This includes ID (Industrial designers, technical apparel designers for racewear and graphic designers). Irvine is the official HQ for all creative work."

The entrance resembling the shape of the V3 helmet chinbar is an indication as to what we might expect inside. A stunningly lit and fully decked-out store is an enticing distraction behind reception. Through the doors and a central hallway passage splits departments, meeting rooms and a large coffee bar. Everything is accessible and feels 'possible'. There is a restricted zone for Advanced Product Concepts, open plan arrangements, second level meeting spaces, an array of old bikes, memorabilia and landmark advertisements as well as a separate zone for sister brand Shift.

"MX is the focus of the entire building," states Finley. "This is who we are. If we get it right in MX, then Bike and Lifestyle will fall in place. We want Lifestyle to be an extension of our sport. It all starts with MX in this building."

Taking a walk down the thoroughfare we hit the design section on our right and the where gear, helmets, boots and other wares come to be. Dave Durham is the creative director and literally oversees the mass of innovation and activity from the mezzanine of his office area above. Fox have been known to tap into the well of the Pasadena Arts Centre College for the hottest talent and Durham embodies some of the spirit needed to steer the artistic and technical direction of the motocross lines. "My dad and my brothers raced so I was lucky to grow up riding dirt bikes," he says. "There was a lot of motocross and BMX. I went to design school and worked in the movie industry, at Sony for a while and a few other random design jobs. As an industrial designer I eventually decided I wanted to work in motocross. I went to a trade











show and pretty much begged for a job from every company making gear. Thor were the only ones that looked at my work and hired me right away. It was a great experience but I was hoping for a better non-corporate environment; that was the part of Thor and Parts Unlimited that I didn't like. I had an interview with Pete Fox and was hired and now I've been here for almost fifteen years."

"It felt like a natural move for me," he adds. "I really enjoyed the graphic and product element of the sport. It is rare that you have such a visual impact tied to such a performance product."

"I was a Senior Designer at that time. I had a few people to support and help me and since then the role has progressed and widened. Fox's aspirations have also moved a lot as well; just look at how much product we do in motocross alone. About two years ago I started working on Bike and this year Lifestyle as well. I have a team of sixteen designers and when I started I had two. So there has been quite an increase."

Durham helms strategies for Fox and major projects like limited edition racewear and the recent FlexAir range that prioritised movement and performance for the rider and was launched to acclaim in the summer of 2015. It has since been re-sculpted and expanded to the Legion enduro line. "I think it was around four years of development to make that happen," he says of FlexAir. "I asked for the first stretch pant to be sewed up in '11. I made some changes to that and had it on Factory Connection [Honda] team at the time with Barcia and Tomac. That was so early but I still remember it being on a Friday and those guys asking if they could race with the gear the next day at a supercross. I knew right then that it was something special. It was a challenge to buck the system and go from a highly durable feel-and-effect 900D fabric to go to a stretch material and to still have it durable enough and perceived to be strong enough. It was a challenge internally and also externally but I feel like we found the right fabric and it ended up being a great product for us."



***"The single biggest reason why I wanted to work for Fox is the single best thing we have in our company; I believe we are almost as old as the sport itself [in the U.S.]..."***





As with the creation of pretty much everything (even including this story) there is a degree of concession. Something like FlexAir (40% higher abrasion durability) was a milestone in the hefty history of Fox but what was the caveat? “The compromise was that we focussed on making sure the consumer was OK with it,” he explains. “It met their expectations of what a race pant should look and feel like so we did some things with the knee panel and pieces that were on our 360 pant and we carried over into FlexAir to make sure we were not going ‘too far’. That was a compromise and I would definitely have preferred to keep it pure but we’ll get there...”

Casting an eye around the design floor area that also contains the stitching and sewing departments as well as ‘hard parts’ the sense of creativity tempered by time, deadlines and pressure is somehow tangible. Motocross gear lines are constantly evolving and Fox has some 300 articles in a season collection and then in various shades and colours. We’re given the chance to peek at some work that will pop up in the spring of 2018. Among the throng surrounded by printouts, samples and prototypes is Shelby Burton, an Industrial Designer and action sports fan who is relatively new to Durham’s flock. “There are different phases with deadlines,” he reveals. “It could be for an initial concept where the ideas are quite rough and then all the way to a more finished product where it is very presentable and almost ready for manufacturing.”

“Deadlines come fast so you have to make informed decisions very quickly. Sometimes you don’t have the breath that you’d like to explore more...and in design you can often explore endlessly! It is hard to say ‘right, I need to draw a line and take a direction with this’ because you often feel you can push it a bit more.”

“I work more in performance wear, so soft goods and textiles and basically the different fabrics and even how they are engineered,” he goes on. “I work a lot with that and try to incorporate something that is new and engineered into a garment itself. I also do some things with the hard goods like helmets where we’ll sketch, prototype and get parts 3D printed. We are trying to look for the next best thing and that process involves a lot of sketching and getting thoughts ‘out’. A lot of it from there goes into refinement and choosing directions.”

Durham has a simple explanation as to how his crew can keep up with the continual rate and fast turnaround. “Everyone always thinks it is quite tough, especially when it comes to motocross gear sets and the constant changes but I honestly attribute it to just loving what we do...and also being really competitive,” he reasons. “I like to hire competitive designers and I am also like that. If I look at the track over a weekend and I see something [good] that someone else has done then it kinda irks me. I want to beat them! I love the sport and it is competitive, and we are too; I think that makes it easier to find something new every year.”

When it comes down to the graft then in this day and age of pads and apps it seems almost archaic to imagine creatives sharpening a pencil. “I draw a lot by hand,” counters Burton. “A lot of ideas come by a whim or maybe I’ll see something that will spark something. I’ll either write down a note or sketch a little, rough idea. From there – depending on what it is or how far I need to go before I show it or move forward – I’ll work it out more in [Adobe] Illustrator in a rough 2D form. A lot of the 3D stuff will come from getting samples sewn-up or working with some of our model makers.”

“I am a total early-bird,” says Durham. “I get up at 5am every morning and get in here as soon as I possibly can so I can get three-four hours design time before I get caught up in meetings. I pretty much live in meetings.”







Having a productive or effective routine is one thing but how is it fed? Where does the inspiration come from to keep on drawing, to keep on thinking and debating. "I love creative energy," Durham attempts to explain. "I love architecture but when it comes down to inspiring our line and what we do every day then what really affects it most is very creative people. Usually it surrounds some kind of underground culture and the expression in that; it could be custom bikes to what people wear to separate themselves at a music festival. It is about how people are really passionate about something. Usually there is something that drives these people to be individual and make some inspiring stuff."

An example of how that feed into Durham's work? "Yeah, take our 'Intake' line," he says. "It really came from Stefan Bradl's MotoGP bike [LCR Honda]. There was something that struck me about the livery in one race I saw on TV and I kept an image of it pinned up on the wall for a long time and I think it definitely inspired that graphic in a big way. It didn't feel like a normal MotoGP bike; it felt different." The case feels almost apt, especially when we explain that Lucio Cechinello's team is one of the more free-thinking, flexible and independent in the paddock.

"I have an archive of a lot of Blogs that I look at," divulges Burton. "I definitely peruse the internet a lot to see what is going on and also tap into my background of action sports and especially in the bike world. I see things that this world lacks that I feel should be there. There can be a lot of different sources and it is a hard thing to try and refine those to make it worthwhile."

"There is a lot of forward-thinking here and limit-pushing," he says. "Fox want to stand out from other companies and also push their own benchmarks. There is almost like an internal competition to move forward and think of something new. Whether that's making a product lighter while being protective at the same

time or something that has a different feel and edge to it...which is pretty cool."

From a look into the process with Answer earlier in January it was curious to see just how much motocross companies observe other sports. Off-road clothing permits a pretty open palette for schemes but is also a significant drain when it comes to hitting sufficient resistance and actual function targets. The kit really takes a hit. And customers need value when it comes to wear and washing. Take a look in any Nike store and the prices and promises around moisture-wicking and slimline fitting garments is alarming. The role of this clothing has become an important augmentation of any sport activity. If you want to run then there is plenty of appropriate attire to choose from now. Think of a football kit. Only ten years ago shirt and shorts were baggy and non-purposeful. Now they are tight, performing, enhancing. Or maybe not as much as they claim. "I feel that sportswear is often not as technical as it appears to be," Durham opines. "From the look and feel and the aesthetics there is often inspiration to be found from many other sports and I have a wide look around but when it gets down to the function of the products I feel that there is a lot of 'show'. I struggle with some of the choices that the 'Big Three' always make – that's a personal opinion. In terms of influence then something like soccer has had an impact for a good decade and even something like American Football has seen some good work and the effect that changing fabrics can have on the sport and things like 'cut'."

FlexAir was the clearest attempt yet for Fox to stride as long and clear with their effectiveness as with their aesthetic design work. It involved even deeper collaboration with key athletes like Ken Roczen, Ryan Dungey and Taddy Blazusiak as the racers used prototype pieces during supercross and major race events. "We have rallied continually with our performance-first product design philosophy and so much of this comes from rider feedback," says Finley.



THE SOURCE: FOX & DESIGN

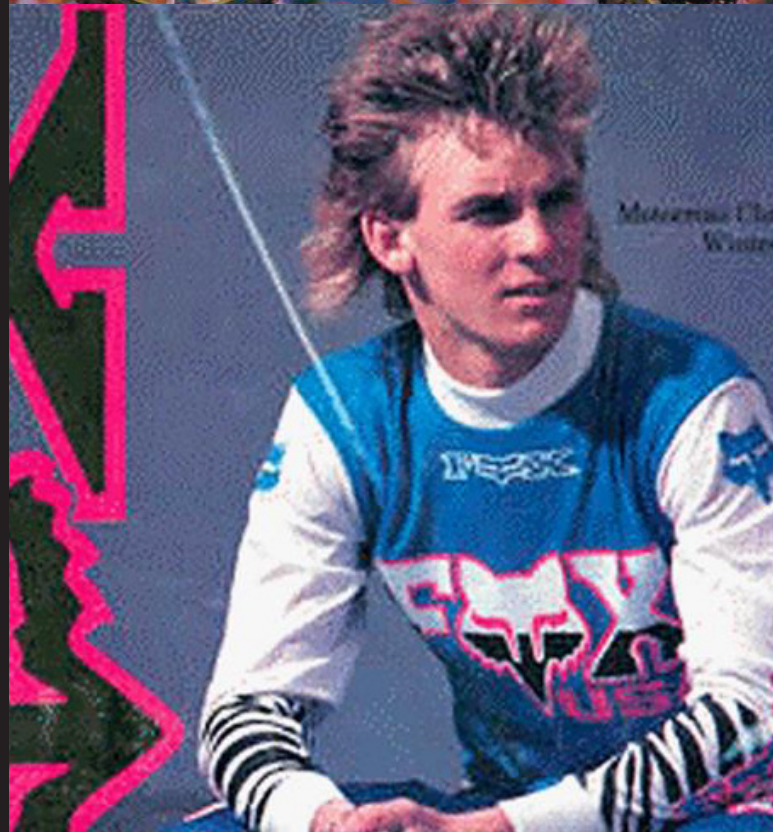




"If we build a product that Ken Roczen and Ryan Dungey helped develop, we feel this should be great for our consumer. Obviously, we have continued to support our franchise products to ensure we are meeting global market needs. But we enjoy pushing the performance boundaries with premium products. We take what we learn here and bring it down to our franchise pieces. The MX 2017 360 pant is a good example of taking what we learned from premium Flexair and bringing it to our core 360 pant (and our core customer). Stretch and freedom of movement for the rider is what we wanted to bring to 360. We used our 4 way stretch TruMotion fabric from Flexair in key areas on the new 360. I feel like we created a hybrid pant that gives our core customer stretch and added durability."

There have been landmarks and milestones with what has come off screens and sample shelves but there is no escaping the fact that Fox still comes across as a pretty damn cool brand. Getting the guys in Irvine to recall some highlights is hardly a chore. "That is easy," reckons Finley. "The racewear that RJ [Ricky Johnson] and [Damon] Bradshaw wore back in the late 80's and early 90's: red/white/blue on RJ and the Zebra and Barbed Wire on Bradshaw. This is all I remember about Fox growing up. I feel these are the styles that put Fox on the map. Still my favorites."

"Whether it was the Zebra, or the cobweb on Bradshaw or Stewart in montage or encore; they were really special moments," offers Durham. "It is a legacy that is amazing and humbling at the same time to work on every day. I think we have the same love for the sport as the consumers and we take it very seriously; I think that is part of the success. We want to make sure we keep it going."







THE SOURCE: FOX & DESIGN







## FOX RACING/HRC

Fox Racing's encompassing association with the championship winning HRC team has finally born fruit with some very official looking casualwear and accessories as worn by the Honda staff and the riders themselves. Three caps, four t-shirts, two hoodies, a cool jacket, shorts, pants and even a shuttle roller bag are part of the line-up.

Have a surf and order the goods here:  
[www.uk.foxhead.com/en\\_GB/men/clothing/honda-collection](http://www.uk.foxhead.com/en_GB/men/clothing/honda-collection)









# CARBO



# MIPS RETROS





PASSION | HARD WORK | PERSEVERANCE

**FLY**  
RACING



By Adam Wheeler  
Photos by Ray Archer

# A NEW BREED?

AFTER A SIX YEAR PERIOD OF DOMINANCE BY TONY CAIROLI **MXGP** HAS BEEN RATTLED FURIOUSLY BY TWO ROOKIES IN THE LAST SEASONS; BOTH YOUNG, HUNGRY AND ATTACKING THE PREMIER CLASS WITH VERVE. HAVE THE SUCCESSFUL EXPLOITS OF ROMAIN FEBVRE AND TIM GAJSER GIVEN THE GRAND PRIX ESTABLISHMENT CAUSE TO REASSESS THE PERILOUS PATH THROUGH A HEFTY WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP CAMPAIGN? WE DECIDED TO ASK AROUND



A NEW INTENSITY IN MXGP?





## There is some weight to the idea.

The last two MXGP FIM World Championships have been won by category rookies and at the ages of 23 and 19 steering different types of works machinery. To put both Romain Febvre and Tim Gajser's achievements put into perspective they have faced opposition from six other factory teams outside of their own and nineteen competitors in the premier class that boast experience of taking a Grand Prix chequered flag or uncorking podium champagne. Stefan Everts won the last of his titles in 2006 at the age of 34. Steve Ramon was next at 28 then David Philippaerts in 2008 with 25 years on the clock. Tony Cairoli's run of six crowns began in 2009 when the Sicilian was 24. Febvre owned proceedings at 23 in 2015 and now Gajser has chopped the scale down to the sub-20s.

Is MXGP – now with twenty rounds, forty motos and sixty race starts (including Qualification Heats) - becoming even more of a young man's game? A contest that always involves a slice of fortune is better built on the virtues of youth, namely through the risk-takers and the aggressors? Perhaps it is just natural evolution of a supremely physical sport. One in which Ryan Dungey is a double AMA Supercross Champion at 26 and Ken Roczen a world MX2 and double AMA Motocross No.1 just after his 22nd birthday.

One thing seems to be fairly clear: Febvre and Gajser have injected more urgency into MXGP. The best example was seen at the Grand Prix of France at St Jean D'Angely in June. Both pulled clear of the pack and were barely separated until the final laps, sharing a moto win each with Febvre taking the overall thanks to his second moto chequered flag. It was not just the authority of the result but also the manner of the performances with both running a ragged edge and living little in the locker. The

duo were embroiled in a championship dispute until Febvre's probing and pacey instincts bit back with a crash in qualification for the British Grand Prix that caused a concussion and derailed the season. In the remaining seven rounds Romain made the podium twice but didn't bag another twenty-five points.

"Two young guys came into the class and pushed the level up and we have to fight more for it," commented Monster Energy Kawasaki's Clement Desalle during an interview at Lommel for the Grand Prix of Belgium in July. Desalle, like peers such as Rockstar Energy IceOne Husqvarna's Max Nagl and HRC's Gautier Paulin have been the chief challengers to Cairoli (now 30) since the start of the decade. The Belgian is also one of five fathers in the MXGP crop. He managed a twentieth Grand Prix win at Assen in August (with a 3-3) and is the second most successful rider aside from Cairoli in the last ten years in the MXGP division. Desalle has also had a poor run with injury and since 2010 has never been able to reach the final motos of campaign for the main prize. In fact with the exception of '10 when Cairoli clinched his second MXGP gong (and first for KTM) with two rounds to go, '22' has managed to have a championship party at least a round early from '09-'14.

"It is important to find a good limit," Desalle believes. "Sometimes when I see the videos [of this year's races] you can really see the limit. As the years pass you get more experience. Let's see how the future turns out because the young guys are very fast and pushing a lot and I think that will change. It is hard to live on the limit all the time without being injured."

To gauge what people are seeing, thinking and observing in MXGP we formulated three questions and grabbed a cross-section from the paddock...



A NEW INTENSITY IN MXGP?







## Is there a sea change coming into MXGP?

**Tony Cairoli, Red Bull KTM, 2nd in the 2016 MXGP FIM World Championship:** 'I don't think the speed has gone up much but there are more riders at a better level. Before four-five riders were good and the rest were so-so. Now it seems from one to thirteen the speed is closer. If you have a bad race you are ninth or tenth whereas before you were fourth or fifth.'

**Marnicq Bervoets, Team Manager, Kemea Yamaha:** 'Last year we saw Romain Febvre more aggressive on the bike and now Tim Gajser. When you saw them riding the 250s then you thought 'they're gonna crash on the 450' but it didn't turn out to be true and it looks like they can handle the bikes with that style. I think this means that the bikes are handling much better now than in years before. The suspension is better, the chassis is a lot better and engine-wise with the electronics is not so aggressive and you can open the gas immediately without freaking out and that helps.'

**Dirk Gruebel, Red Bull KTM Team Manager (MX2):** 'It looks like they have a different approach in the first fifteen minutes of the race. They go 110% and push really hard. If you go three-four years back then people made the start, pushed for two laps, somehow they settled and then they raced. Now it looks like they go as hard as they can and look to survive until the end.'

**Stefan Everts, General Manager, Team Suzuki, x10 World Champion:** 'I don't think it will be like this every year. Tony had been at the top for quite a few seasons and I think we are just seeing the new generation coming in to take over. Febvre, Gajser and next year Herlings are going to be the ones taking championships for the coming years. I don't think we'll see a new guy popping up every year to take over.'

**Cairoli:** 'I don't think we are seeing some 'new generation'. There have been two good years



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for 'them' and a lot of injuries to me, Desalle, Nagl. This year there were some up-and-downs for me. Lets say they are a little wilder in some places and they get lucky with some sketchy moments...but that is part of motocross. They are young and they go for it whereas we may-be think about staying safe and go for points. Maybe their approach is working a little bit better at the moment. For me second place is also quite good. In thirteen years of Grand Prix motocross I have stayed part of the top three and I cannot complain. Next year we'll be more ready.'

**Harvey:** 'Look at the sizes of them. Tim is becoming a big strong lad and Jeffrey Herlings also. There comes a time when they need 450 power and they move onto that. When Tim moved up late into 2015 people said to us "are you sure?" and seeing how he rode the 250 last year we were pretty confident about what he could do and he proved that.'

**Gruebel:** 'It is a different generation and they run different tactics. Most of them so far have been lucky in terms of big injuries – I'm excluding Jeffrey because he has had some big ones in MX2 – but if you want to run with the front guys then you need to approach it in the same way: like they do in MX2 when they go flat out. Jeffrey does it this way and you have seen Febvre and Gajser go up and it has worked for them.'

**pion, 4th in the 2016 series:** 'Gajser is really young and he could have stayed three or four more years in MX2 but he decided to move and had nothing to prove anymore. I think Herlings should have moved before because his level is the same or going a bit down. He has had no competitors and was leading many motos by a big distance so even if he made a mistake or even a small crash then he didn't have to worry. In MXGP this year then a small mistake meant you could not win the moto. I think the level between Gajser and myself went higher and higher and the others were starting to catch us after the first part of the season. Even if Tim or myself had a bad start then we were able to come back and now it is a bit more difficult because everyone has stepped up. Age is not important but attitude is and you have to make the right decision about what you want to do.'

**Harvey:** 'I think all of them push the limits. And I don't think it is necessary.'

**Everts:** 'The difference is the intensity of the racing. The aggression that they have! Romain and Tim are attacking from the first lap on. The older generation find their position and tend to follow, they have their limit and cannot stretch it too much. The new guys still have reserves and something in the pocket to attack and make passes. In some GPs you might see Max [Nagl] start well and run at the front then when he doesn't start well he is in the pack and cannot come through. The same for Tony. There are only a few who can come back to the front and that's the new generation.'

**Febvre:** 'Mentally I did not change but I had to push more this year. Last year I was the one raising the level and it was a bit easier. Tim came and started winning right away and quickly took confidence. In France we were really close battling and we pulled away by quite a few seconds from the others. I really raised my game there and he actually beat me in one moto. The level was going like this [angle hand upwards] each moto.'







**Gruebel:** 'That these guys could come up and win the world championship in their rookie season: this didn't happen so much in the past but they use a different riding style and tactics. The older guys can win some races also – for sure – but over the whole season? The tracks are getting faster and you need to adapt. It seems like they are better for the younger generation.'

### Will the style and attitude calm over the years? Will injuries play a part?

**Cairolì:** 'For sure when you hit the ground with the 450 it is a different story compared to the 250 where you can save a 'moment' easier. It is also part of the job: the more you crash the more you are scared to ride.'

**Bervoets:** 'You have some guys – like Romain and Tim – that are really strong. They have crashes but genetically they can withstand it. It's like [Valentin] Guillod also. I see him have some big crashes and he comes back in with

nothing just some bruises. They are really flexible. It is nothing to do with luck I think you are just born like that. Others can crash at 10kmph and they pick-up something.'



**Harvey:** 'The only guarantee with two wheels is that you won't be on them at one time or another.'

**Everts:** 'These guys are not scared. They will open the throttle and see how they can make the turn. Sometimes you can see them over the edge and the others a bit less.'

**Harvey:** 'Gajser broke his back at the Motocross of Nations in 2014 and came back riding a couple of months later. I think they have all had their injuries by the time they reach this level. It affects different people in different ways and the young probably think less about it. Some of the crashes Tim had last year – and [Pauls] Jonas as well – where he has gone so high off the bike and you think 'whoah, that will calm them down' but no...they remedy their mistakes and they don't make them again. Everyone gets a good slap or two. I think crashes make them work through their riding a bit differently. They seem like a 'new guard of old hands'; riders who are not only fast but with a lot of experience and a lot of drive.



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**Febvre:** 'I speak for myself because I cannot talk about the others but I am pushing my level...and also trying not to take many risks. I do not want to disconnect my brain and that's why I have not been too good in Timed Practice. I was a bit better last year but I am usually not at the front because I cannot switch off my head for just one lap. I am not crazy. I do what I can. Before my crash in the UK we'd done half of the championship and we'd been at the front every GP. Other riders are up-and-down and when they feel good they can produce and take more risks. They do that when they feel it is their weekend whereas we are consistently at the front. After my injury I had just two weeks of riding but came back and was third overall straightaway.'

**Cairolì:** 'I was riding half a season without confidence. I was riding conservatively and to survive the first rounds. I could not attack when the goal was to attack from the first races and make it clear that you are going to be fight-

ing for the championship. Also for the mental side this helps. So I was riding under my full potential until Teutschenthal [Germany, round seven] and then better and better but then had a broken hand in England. It was difficult to accept these problems.'

**Febvre:** 'We are not taking risks but the high consistency is there. We are pushing the level. I think Gajser had more moments than me. He was not out of control...but he had some luck to stay on the bike. He is good.'

**Bervoets:** 'With the older riders everything tends to have to be perfect. The younger riders live for the bike and, championship or not, they want to go as fast as possible and many times when you do that then you crash and [suffer] nothing. It is really strange.'

**Everts:** 'The older you get the more you change and more you want to be in control of your racing. With Tim there were a few times





in racing when it was 'on-off' and they are not scared to be on that edge and limit. The same for Romain. The older generation will maybe ride with a bit more control.'

**Bervoets:** 'The older guys want to be safe... or they want to be 'sure' when they are going through a section...and this might cost them three tenths and lead to a bad gate position and then a bad start.'



**Harvey:** 'Having a kid is no difference at all to be honest. Look at Cal Crutchlow in road racing – I know it is a different scene – but they have to have the same sort of mindset and he's gone quicker since he had a nipper. In my experience I went quicker because I needed to 'keep' more people! I really don't think that anybody with a nipper is rolling it off or they are more cautious.'

**Everts:** 'I also went through a stage where it was really tough to make the difference to the other riders. Towards the end of my career I changed my training schedule to work even more on intensity and circuit training to get back more aggression. I had previously been all about endurance. At one point you get a bit lazy and take the easy way. In my last years I

stepped it up again and you could see that in my last season. It was all about preparation.'

## Anything can happen at any moment in motocross...but can the older guys still vie for the championship?

**Everts:** 'It is going to be hard for them to change. They can win some GPs but it will be hard for them to take a grip on the whole championship. There are only a few guys who can do that for a whole year and be strong and consistent in any track condition. Can they change? Yes, but they really must want it and find the right way to work.'

**Gruebel:** 'It is a tough question. Tony showed this year that he still has it.'

**Cairolì:** 'This year I am second and I am not riding at even 70%. I think my speed is lower than before: with the injuries I lost some confidence and speed. To be second still means something and when I am slow everybody looks fast. This is what I think. This year was one of my worst for riding and I felt very bad watching myself on videos and stuff; it wasn't really me that I was seeing. I can still pull the pin and will be more prepared and more focussed next year.'

**Bervoets:** 'I don't think so. I had the same problem towards the end of my career. There will be races like we saw in Lommel this year with [Kevin] Strijbos; he could win because he was consistent and he was on 'his' track and it wasn't dangerous. It will be the same for the likes of Desalle and Cairolì: on tracks that are good for them, where it is not crazy-difficult and they don't have to be so aggressive then they can win. You can see it already in Timed Practice. Many times Cairolì will not have a good lap...but he is so strong mentally that if he makes a good start then he gets a kick and can ride his own lines and doesn't have to be aggressive to pass. In those circumstances he can win or ride at the front.'



## A NEW INTENSITY IN MXGP?

**Cairolì:** 'It is difficult to find the confidence again. You need results, to steer clear of injuries and have a lot of trust in the bike. I struggled in the beginning of the season with the 450. We moved to the 350 and that was good for me mentally because I knew the bike but it was not competitive enough so we went back to the 450. We will have another winter now to understand the bike and be ready. That's all I can do at the moment.'

**Bervoets:** 'To be a champion is getting harder and the young guys are pushing more. They are scrubbing so hard and it uses so much energy. In the old days you were not used to it and you had to learn it whereas the guys now seem born into that way of riding. It is automatic and perhaps less so for the older guys.'

### **Jeffrey Herlings, Red Bull KTM and x3 MX2**

**FIM World Champion:** 'Once I step up to the big boys I really need to be on my game. The Lites class in Europe was really for laughing because I knew for the last four or five years when I was on the startline that if I was fit and in pretty good shape then I'd have the championship. Only injuries could stop me and they did. I learned a lot recently with the races in America; the guys are so focussed on their job and intense and I know I need to be really focussed on the first couple of laps next year. I need that intensity and to be really aggressive. I missed that during these years in MX2 because wherever I started I could just get my speed and I knew I had more than the others. Next year I'll need to do it more American style.'

**Harvey:** 'I think it is going to be really hard for the older guys to match them. Romain started the roll, Tim kept it going and obviously Jeffrey will be strong next year. I think it will be hard for the establishment to match these guys because it will be really intense. The Cairolis, Nagls, Desalles will find it tough. Even Bobby [28 year old HRC rider Evgeny Bobryshev] said something like 'how do those two guys get there?' I think the established riders will find it hard to pick things up.'

**Febvre:** 'If we speak about Nagl and Cairolì then they are near, or in, their thirties but they can still win. The championship? I don't know. I think they can still improve their level and it is up to them. You need to have the same passion and desire. If you mind is saying 'take it easy, take your time' then it is more difficult. Gauthier never won the championship but he is still young enough to do it. If you have that desire then I think it is possible.'





# THE 'GRATE' LEVELLER?

By Adam Wheeler

**T**he official MXGP magazine is a neutral, middling and emblematic publication for the FIM Motocross World Championship but it does have one unbeatable asset. Youthstream President Giuseppe Luongo pens a monthly column and the charismatic Italian just loves to sprinkle crumbs of breaking news into his exposition. Through the pages of the latest edition of the mag published last week Luongo confirmed some recent rumours that MXGP will revert to a metal mesh as a starting gate platform, recently trialled in the inaugural SMX meeting at the Veltins Arena. On the subject of which: Youthstream also publicly issued a strong rallying cry for the event that did not attract the anticipated spectators numbers and the promoters were analysing the fixture while not being forthcoming on details for future incarnations. Will the inaugural SMX have any bearing on whether Supercross can spread internationally? It is hard not to imagine that the management at Feld were casting some critical eye over proceedings in Germany.

Back to the start gate though. Watching the amount of time and craft that riders put into their slot can be quite revealing. Some seem to use the ten minute pre-race period (or longer; some MXGP competitors actually venture down during the second MX2 moto and already to move dirt or sand around) as a way to focus and get into a zone. Kicking the ground and preparing a line and rut for the best launch become almost a scientific exercise of clearing, packing, definition and optimisation. It is a wholly individual process and it's clear that select riders

really do not like to be bothered by media or other obligations while getting on with their 'gardening'. Gate prep can mirror a rider's approach to their profession; those that are diligent to the point of obsessive (carrying extra soil or sand in with their hands) and others that have a quick pad and just get on with it. Like chalking a cue, bouncing a tennis ball or practice-swinging a club, preparation might be a pre-game ritual or habit that a large portion of Grand Prix riders have had for most of their careers...and now they won't need it. OTOR's ever-reliable go-to MXGP star for insight, Shaun Simpson, provided some scope.

"I think it definitely gives you a mental edge... even over other riders when you look left and right and see your gate is packed better than theirs," the new Wilvo Yamaha representative says. "I always felt my gate was one of the better prepared. I wanted something nice and straight, no rocks or anything that would give wheelspin. Even a nice ramp coming over the gate. When you rolled into it you'd feel that you were ready, and more so than the next rider. Nine times out of ten it would not equate to an amazing start but it gave that little jolt of confidence."

When it comes to that most crucial of moments in a Grand Prix – and at some circuits a poor start can mean certain podium position loss – then the metal mesh should provide parity. There are unknown ramifications for tyre wear, traction, wet conditions, revised electronics and perhaps even different settings depending on the terrain underneath and on the other side of





the gate. It means that teams will have a whole new dimension to their testing work during the coming months. On a superficial level the alteration to the makeup of a Grand Prix means that the phase before a race start will also change.

"I think you will see riders turning up a lot later now, maybe just a few minutes before the sighting lap," Simpson adds. "Generally the start will be fairer. I think you will have more time to mentally focus. Good starts will come down to testing during the week and some different things in the engine for maximum traction on this mesh. You might be feathering the clutch. There will be a lot of different things going on and it is an exciting new 'something'; a nice fair way to get on the same playing field."

A small cultural shift then for MXGP athletes but I've yet to hear of somebody verbally 'turning their nose up' at the new gate. Yet another reason to keenly anticipate Qatar on February 25th.

***"Gate prep is a routine Grand Prix riders have had for most of their careers...and now they won't need it..."***







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## SCOTT SPORTS

Training time is kicking in for the lot of Pro motocrossers with their thoughts on 2017. Anyone looking to follow suit by hitting the tarmac or venturing onto trails on foot would do well to look at some of the excellent products by Scott Sports. We trialled the **T2 Kinabalu 3.0** running shoes at the weekend and the comfort was second to none. Scott have varying levels and construction of their running shoes and the 3.0s is the pick of the bunch thanks to the eRide curved sole (with an 11mm 'drop'), nicely designed and effective grip and a rock protection plate. The laces gave a firm fit and – like we said – the feeling was superb right out of the box through long periods of use. Scott have a women's version, an enduro model, a Supertrac edition (with an even more pronounced grip) and Gore Tex. There are then other training and running choices with some lively colour schemes. Expect to pay around 100 pounds for the T2 Kinabalu 3.0 (in three different designs).

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Monster Energy Girls  
By Ray Archer











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**'On-track Off-road'** is a free, bi-weekly publication for the screen focused on bringing the latest perspectives on events, blogs and some of the very finest photography from the three worlds of the FIM Motocross World Championship, the AMA Motocross and Supercross series' and MotoGP. 'On-track Off-road' will be published online at [www.ontrackoffroad.com](http://www.ontrackoffroad.com) every other Tuesday. To receive an email notification that a new issue available with a brief description of each edition's contents simply enter an address in the box provided on the homepage. All email addresses will be kept strictly confidential and only used for purposes connected with OTOR.

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